

Capitol Gate House
15th & Constitution Avenue
Washington
District of Columbia

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PHOTOGRAPHS
Written Historic and Descriptive Data
District of Columbia

Historic American Buildings Survey
Prepared at Washington Office

ADDITIONAL
FOLIO

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Capitol Gatehouses and Piers
Washington, D. C.

Owner: United States Government

Date of erection: original c. 1825; rebuilt c. 1870 and 1939

Architect: Latrobe or Bulfinch

Present condition: good; restored

Material of construction: Aquia Creek stone

The Original Fences, Gates, and Gate Lodges of the
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There seems to be no definite information as to when the Capitol setting was completed and the grounds enclosed, or to the authorship of the design for the fence, piers, and lodges. In view of the persistent attribution to Bullfinch, his authorship perhaps may be accepted. The design, however, is much more in the spirit of Latrobe's work, but it may have been that Bullfinch subordinated his own taste to that of Latrobe, and designed the lodges and piers to harmonize with ^{the} basement story of the Capitol, designed by the latter.

The earliest description of the fence, piers, and lodges seems to be that of Robert Mills, in his guide to the Capitol published in 1834. In this he says, "There are four grand entrances to these grounds, two from the north and south for carriages, and two from the east and west for foot passengers. The western entrance at the foot of the hill, is flanked by two stone lodges, highly ornamented for watch houses, etc.; from this you ascend by two flights of steps before you reach the grand terrace."

This description coincides closely with a nearly contemporary one in Watterston's Picture of Washington, published in 1841. This reads that, "Proceeding through the western entrance of the Capitol [building] you reach a spacious terrace, paved with Seneca free stone, and extending in a beautiful sweep from north to south. Beneath this terrace, which is below the level of the east front, is a row of casemate arches, forming depositories for the wood and coal annually consumed in the building. The terrace is faced with two flights of stone steps on either side of the

open arches under the middle of these is a handsome marble fountain from which . . . water . . . falls into a beautiful basin of white marble, and thence flows into a reservoir cased with stone, and in which has been erected a monument to the memory of young naval officers. . . Further west is another fall or glacis, with stone steps, from the bottom of which three fine walks paved with granite, lead to the principal eastern (evidently a misprint, as this is the western side) one in the center, one opening into the Maryland, and the other into the Pennsylvania Avenue. On each side of the center gateway are porters' lodges, which, with the stone piers of the gates, are constructed in the same style as the basement of the building."

Streeter, in his Strangers' Guide (1850) says, "The Capitol . . is surrounded by beautifully ornamented grounds, comprising in all, 30 acres, the whole enclosed with a substantial wrought iron fence."

A plot plan of the Capitol, drawn in 1815, indicates no development of the grounds to the west but does show that the area to the east was laid out by then. Various general plans of the city, such as that in Streeter's Strangers' Guide show the general development of the Capitol grounds. Immediately to the east of the building was a wide esplanade through which there was a carriage drive. This drive narrowed towards the north and south limits of the grounds and entered into A Streets, north and south. Directly in front of the Capitol, from the esplanade were two lateral paths, leading to 1st Street, east, which marked the sides of a wide lawn. Beginning at the N. E. and S. E. corners of the building was the beginning of an elliptical terrace

which carried completely around the west side of the building. From the west center three paths radiated, one directly west, and two diagonally, these latter being centered on Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues. The west perimeter of the grounds was semicircular, the curve being tangent with A Streets, north and south.

This layout confirms the descriptions and in turn is confirmed by the abundant evidence of engravings, paintings, and photographs of the Capitol. The lateral paths to the east are shown in Morrison's east view, which as well shows gate piers at the west end of the paths, of the same design as those surviving from the Capitol now at 15th and Constitution Avenue, N. W. An iron fence is shown between the two inside gate piers, enclosing the west end of the east lawn. Just to the east of this fence (though other views incorrectly show it to the west) is an elliptical enclosure with an iron fence around it. It may be that this was a fountain or pool. This arrangement is verified by an old photograph c. 1860.

Of the carriage gateways at the north and south of the grounds there is a photograph as well as an excellent water color in the archives of the Map Division of the Library of Congress. This shows a gateway of three general divisions. The central division has two pair of carriage gates separated by wrought iron panels from the pedestrians' gates at either side. The piers are of stone, the two side ones in the style of those surviving on Constitution Avenue, massive, square, rusticated shafts with decorative caps, and the three center ones slender stone cylinders, tapered toward the top, resembling columns without caps

or bases. These support not only iron gates, but lanterns fixed to their tops.

An engraving by Kollner (1848) shows the return of a low railing around the north end of the Capitol which is the beginning of the ellipse seen on the plan. The rails here resting on stone cappings, are apparently of cast iron, a design of erect ovals containing anthemions similar to extant rails in the west portico. Such rails appear again in Bartlett's "Ascent to the Capitol". This view shows an inclined stone paved walk ascending to the lower of the flights of stairs described by Mills. These rails are raised on stone copings and interspersed with low stone piers, which step up in accordance with the slope. The lower flight of steps is single, the full width of the path, and has tall lamp standards on its newel piers. Above the first flight is seen a triple arcade behind the Naval Monument referred to. At the sides of this loggia are two flights of steps, similar in design to the lower, that lead to the top terrace. From this level, however, a further single flight, also similar in design, led to the west entrance of the building.

Curiously enough, except for one distant photograph, no view or plan seems to exist that shows the gate houses in place, flanking the end of the axial west walk. This photograph unfortunately is so vague as to be inconclusive. It is a view from across Tiber Creek, ✓ which once came up to the foot of Capitol Hill. In the background is seen the Capitol, with the dome incomplete, and in the middle

ground one corner of the north gatehouse can be seen through the shrubbery and trees. A photograph in Glenn Brown's "History of the Capitol" shows one gatehouse upon its present site.

There are, however, several excellent views of the Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenue gates. An engraving by Morrison for the Strangers' Guide (1842) shows six piers with gates between the central two. The piers are identical with those now on Constitution Avenue, rusticated with scroll caps enriched with carving. Beyond the piers is an iron fence that is repeated in the two flanking bays. The gates do not show well, but were probably identical in design with the fence. They were hung, not from the stone piers, but from decorative panels of ironwork set in from the piers. The design of these panels and the fence are preserved in two detail photographs, one in Brown's "History of the U. S. Capitol", and the other (taken c. 1865) in the magazine section of the Sunday Star (Washington) for December 24, 1933. These show the fence to be of plain, round uprights with finials that are reminiscent of lotus heads. The panels adjacent to the gate are about 15 inches to 18 inches wide with anthemion terminations.

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Works consulted. (Those marked * referred to).

Books:

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| * Watterston, G. | Picture of Washington |
| " " | New Guide to Washington (Wash. 1841) |
| Wyeth, S. D. | Federal City |
| Stewart, J. | Early Maps of Washington |
| Chipman, N. P. | Extension of Capitol Grounds |
| * Mills, Robert | Guide to the Capitol |
| Richstein, W. F. | Strangers' Guide to Washington |
| Bohn, | Illustrated Album |
| " | Handbook of Washington |
| Force, W. Q. | Picture of Washington |
| * Streeter, E. | Strangers' Guide to Washington |
| Philip & Solomons | Washington, What to see, etc. |
| Haas, P. | Public Buildings of Washington |
| Wineberger, J. A. | Guide to Washington (Wash. 1865) |
| Elliot, S. A. | Washington Guide (Wash. 1826) |
| * Brown, Glenn | History of the U. S. Capitol - 1900 |

Engravings, etc.

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| * Bartlett, W. F. | Ascent to the Capitol - 1840
(from American scenery) |
| * Morrison, | East View of Capitol - 1842 |
| " | S. W. " " " - 1842 |
| Fischer, Wm. | Elev. of the South Part of the Capitol
of the United States - 1839 |
| * Unknown | South Gateway to the Capitol - 1839
Water color #62, Capitol Coll. Map Div.
Library of Congress. |

Jones, Alfred	Capitol of the United States - 1845
* Kollner, Aug.	N. E. View of Capitol - 1848 (#69, Capitol Coll, Map Div. Library of Congress)
" "	S. W. View (Probably inaccurate) - 1848
* Unknown	Photo of W. Ascent of Capitol c. 1860 (Coll. Old Washington Views, Fine Arts Div. Library of Congress, Custody Miss Plunkett).
* "	Photo. Gates on Pennsylvania Avenue axis (Capitol - Sunday Star, Dec. 24, 1933, Mag. p. 7.).

NOTES ON PHOTOS IN THE OFFICE OF THE
ARCHITECT OF THE CAPITOL

There are five large bound folios containing photographs of the Capitol during the alterations of c. 1860 and photographs of the working drawings.

Vol. 1, photo 65 is an excellent detail of the north entrance gates. This shows double vehicular gates, separated by tall plain square piers without caps. The gates seem to have some interlacing motive, such as the White House gates have. There are lanterns atop the piers. To either side of these gates are further single gates for pedestrians. These have the familiar rusticated piers like those now on Constitution Avenue. Between the two types of piers are two narrow bays with plain wrought-iron grilles. The foot gates are two-valve with stationary wrought-iron grilles on either side of them to decrease the opening.

There is another view of the above in an odd unnumbered calf-bound volume.

In Vol. 2 are a group of informing photographs.

Photo 4 is southeast view of Capitol showing clairvoyee and east gates to the forecourt.

7 View from north-northwest of west front showing elliptical terrace and top of terrace.

14 South gates, distant view.

15 North gates, distant view.

25 (1858) View from west shows gatehouses in distance, also the side gates dimly and the iron fence between, apparently with small stone piers.

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Photo 35 West entrance from southwest shows rails and lamps.

41 West entrance from high up in north wing, very definite.

Volumes 3 and 4 do not have pertinent photos.

In the U. S. Army Signal Corps file listed as Brady 2292, "Old Capitol Prison and Capitol Fence," is a view showing a detail of one corner of the fence.

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Illustrative Material Relating to the
Capitol Gatehouses, Piers, and Fence

History of U. S. Capitol, Glenn Brown, G. P. O. 1900

Pl. 59--Plat by Thomas U. Walter, showing gatehouses on diagonal axes

Pl. 81--Shows the reconstructed gatehouses

Pl. 82--Shows the reconstructed gate piers

Pl. 254--Plat in 1815; no western development of grounds shown but eastern square laid out

Sunday Star Magazine, December 24, 1933

Page 7--Shows piers and gates on Pennsylvania Avenue Axis, with ironwork

Strangers Guide, E. Streeter, 1842

View by Morrison from southwest showing Maryland Avenue axis, with six piers

View by Morrison, east side, showing clairvoyee with side gates

Plan for Enlarging the Grounds around the Capitol, Thomas U. Walter, 1866

Shows four piers on Pennsylvania Avenue and Maryland Avenue axes. Gatehouses and piers at New Jersey and Delaware Avenue axes.

Ascent to the Capitol, W. H. Bartlett, c. 1840

Shows ramps and steps, lamps and monument in front of west side of Capitol (from American Scenery)

Engraving of West Front, Sachse, 1866 (?)

Shows two terraces, a single lower flight and a double upper with a triple loggia between the latter. Also a low elliptical enclosure across the central part of Capitol.

General Plan for the Extension of the U. S. Capitol Grounds, John Frasee, Architect, c. 1874

Naturalistic plan, much as at present except Congressional Library and Department of Justice included in grounds.

Elevation of the East Front of the Capitol of the United States, William Fischer, 1839

Shows clairvoyee

Water color, No. 62, Capitol Collection, Library of Congress, Mss. Division

Shows piers with lamps above. Two lanes with two terminal piers.

Northeast View, by August Kollner, 1848, Idem No. 69

Shows return of railing around end of Capitol

Southwest View, by August Kollner

Shows four piers in poor perspective, seeming on center, but probably on Maryland Avenue axis

Capitol of the United States, Alfred Jones (1845?)

Shows Pennsylvania entrance of six piers

Public Buildings in Washington, P. Haas

Illustrates Naval Monument

Illustrated Album, Bohn

Facing p. 20--General view of west steps

Old Brick Capitol (Later Prison), Brady (U. S. A. Signal Corps)

Photo shows dwarf stone wall, random coursed ashlar, cut coping 2 feet above ground and fence 5 feet 6 inches to 6 feet high, with no corner pier.

CAPITOL GATEHOUSES

Fifteenth and Seventeenth Streets at Constitution Avenue
Washington, D. C.

"In preparing the information for the stone setting drawing for the reconstruction of the old Capitol Gatehouses, I was confronted with several difficulties. Inasmuch as the buildings were designed to conform to the basement story of the Capitol, it occurred to me that I might find solutions of similar difficulties there. I therefore made another careful examination of this part of the Capitol.

"While the quoins, water table and entablature with guilloche ornament are similar to the gatehouses, they are naturally larger in scale. Moreover, there are eight quoin courses and nowhere are columns used at this level as at the gatehouses.

"I then went over to the Library of Congress and discussed the problem with Dr. Holland, who is a great student of the Capitol. I told him I had recently come to the conclusion that the gatehouses may have been Latrobe's design rather than Bulfinch, as generally believed. He suggested that we look through the Latrobe drawings in his department, which we did, together with Congressman Ball, who came in at that time.

"Among the drawings was one by one of Latrobe's draftsmen, that showed a basement loggia across the north and south elevations of the Capitol. These elements, Dr. Holland told me, Latrobe liked very much, and were approved for construction by Congress, but perhaps never built. The remarkable feature of their design was the parallel to that of the gatehouses. The major variation was the use of engaged columns against the rusticated quoin strip, rather than free standing columns. The order was Tuscan the same as used in the gatehouses, and most significant to me was the fact that the base mould of the building formed the base of the columns. This is the relationship I have always felt should obtain at the gatehouses, but it did not occur to me that the buildings could be eight quoin courses high, rather than seven. This latter is the height of the piers in the west enclosure.

"I have made a diagrammatic drawing showing the result of adding two courses, as well as one, to the present height of the buildings. The use of eight courses corrects the unfortunate lack of a base for the Tuscan columns. This order requires a base, which the Doric does not, but the identity cannot be confused as the former has a plain shaft and the latter has a

fluted one. It is probably significant that the Tuscan proportion of seven diameters fits the gatehouses perfectly at the increased height.

"In addition to the difficulties in the use of the order on the building, the question of stone jointing is a serious one. The quoins are alternately jointed vertically on either face. With the introduction of one course under the one below the entablature, two vertical joints will occur together, making a joint two courses high. This cannot be obviated by simply adding a correctly jointed course to the top, as the top course is 2 inches less in height than the others (due to the omission of the rustication), and therefore the new course has to be added below it. Probably the stones can be shifted from corner to corner to correct the fault in jointing.

"I am sorry that this new evidence has created a question regarding the design of the restoration of the gatehouses. I feel that I should acquaint you with it so you will be fully advised on the matter. To me the design of the buildings at eight courses is much improved, especially when one considers that they originally were part of the major architectural composition of the country, and that they stood at the foot of a considerable eminence."

--Memorandum written by Thomas T. Waterman, May 4, 1939.

U.S. Capitol, Gatehouse
15th and Constitution Avenue
(moved from west entrance to Capitol)
Washington
District of Columbia

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Addendum to:

Capitol Gate House
15th and Constitution Avenue
Washington
District of Columbia

PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

Addendum to
U.S. Capitol Gatehouses
(Bulfinch Capitol Gatehouses)
15th and 17th Streets NW and Constitution Avenue
Washington
District of Columbia

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